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July 13, 2021

The Honorable Joe Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your administration's commitment to support those workers and communities that will be negatively impacted by any transition away from the use of coal and other fossil fuels in America. Ghost towns and shuttered factories across the country are testaments to what happens when we turn our backs on those who suffer the most during major economic transitions, such as the one we now face in the energy sector. Regardless of where one stands on the underlying issues driving this transition, I believe we all can be united in the belief that we have a moral obligation to those who have powered our nation's prosperity in the past.

Colorado has a detailed [statewide plan](#) to help workers and communities transition away from coal as an economic driver. Other states -- from California to Pennsylvania and West Virginia -- are advancing similar strategies. In that process, we are learning valuable lessons that can benefit other states and the nation as a whole.

I am writing to share some of those lessons and to ask that they be at the center of your efforts to make the Federal Government an effective partner in ensuring just and equitable transitions for these workers and communities.

The move to new sources of energy will create many thousands of new jobs and significant economic opportunities throughout our economy. Still, other jobs will be obsolete and there will be difficult challenges for some fossil-fuel communities and workers. In Colorado alone, several thousand family-sustaining jobs are likely to become obsolete over the next decade as we transition away from coal as a fuel for generating electricity. Tens of thousands of other coal jobs will likely disappear throughout the nation over the same period.

These changes are the result of a fundamental shift in energy markets and the nation's response to the global climate crisis. **But while this shift may be both essential and inevitable, we have a choice as to how it will be experienced by traditional energy workers and communities.** They must continue to share in our nation's prosperity.

States have a central role to play in this. But they cannot do it alone, especially when it comes to worker-related strategies that may cost significant amounts of money. Nor should they -- most of the coal that has fueled our economy is concentrated in a handful of states with relatively small populations.

For example, Wyoming and West Virginia combined account for only one-half of one percent of the nation's GDP. But they mine more than half of the nation's coal and are home to more than a third of the nation's coal miners. These states should not be left to fund costly worker transitions on their own. The whole country has benefited from their work, and the Federal Government should therefore ensure they are treated consistently and equitably regardless of where they happen to live.

Nor should states be left to fund community transitions on their own. Coal facilities are usually among the largest economic drivers and property tax payers in their communities. And while successful transitions must be driven at the community level and build on local strengths, assets, and visions, the Federal Government is the *only* partner with the capacity to provide consistent and equitable financial support for these efforts throughout the nation.

Indeed, key to the success of any state's transition strategy is the active partnership of the Federal Government. We therefore urge you to pursue the following strategies to help ensure a consistent, equitable, and just transition throughout the nation.

1. Develop a national strategy for impacted fossil-fuel workers

Experts in Colorado and other states have made significant recommendations for how the public sector can assist coal workers as they transition to good jobs elsewhere in the economy (or to retirement when appropriate). These include training strategies, assistance with job searches and related expenses, and relocation reimbursements.

These recommendations recognize the difficulty of the transition many workers will face. But they also will be costly to implement. Leaving the development and financing of worker transitions to individual states will lead to a hodgepodge of responses, with some states able to provide varying levels of assistance to displaced workers and other states unable to provide any support at all.

A uniform national approach would avoid such disparities, while making transitions more affordable and effective. And by spreading the responsibility across all 50 states, it would be a fairer approach. The Federal Government is in a far better position than individual states to establish and fund uniform benefits for energy workers. It may also be able to do so relatively simply, in part by amending existing programs that already provide assistance for other displaced workers. We believe extending existing national programs to cover displaced fossil-fuel workers is likely to be a much better solution than relying exclusively on states to construct and fund their own programs from scratch.

2. Address local budget shortfalls due to loss of property taxes and other revenues

Local communities often depend on coal mines and power plants for a large portion of property taxes and other revenue that support local schools and other critical infrastructure and services. The loss of these revenue streams could be devastating to many communities, making recovery much more difficult.

The ability of individual states to backfill for the loss of local revenues until new employers and economic drivers take their place will vary significantly -- and in all cases will be difficult. Here again, the Federal Government can play an important (and temporary) role to help communities get back on their economic feet after the closure of coal facilities.

3. Finance long-term state and local economic development, resiliency, and diversification

Effective local economic transitions cannot happen from the top-down. They must be driven by communities themselves. But many of the most heavily affected communities throughout the nation are small and therefore will require additional technical and financial resources to lead and implement promising strategies. And because these transitions will likely be permanent, our commitment must be for the long term. States can and should help. But, again, the Federal Government is the *only* partner in this process that can provide consistent financial support for these recovery efforts.

Our nation faces a promising clean energy future. But we cannot turn our backs on those who have provided the energy backbone of our past prosperity. We have enough ghost towns and shuttered factories. We can leave a legacy not only of clean energy, but of a new approach to major economic transitions -- one in which every worker and every community has a chance to thrive. We urge you to lead toward such a transition, and we pledge our support for such a national effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jared Polis
Governor of Colorado

CC:

Brian Deese, Director of the National Economic Council
Jennifer Granholm, US Secretary of Energy
Gina McCarty, National Climate Advisor
Susan Rice, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
Marty Walsh, US Secretary of Labor
Diana DeGette, United States Representative
Ed Perlmutter, United States Representative
Doug Lamborn, United States Representative
Ken Buck, United States Representative
Joe Neguse, United States Representative
Jason Crow, United States Representative
Lauren Boebert, United States Representative
Michael Bennet, United States Senator
John Hickenlooper, United States Senator
Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader
Jim Clyburn, Majority Whip
Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader
Steve Scalise, Minority Whip
Charles E. Schumer, Majority Leader
Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader